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NOTRE DAME - BRIDGE AND BEACON

Every university, worthy of note, has its own proper spirit, tradition, potentialities, and accomplishments. The University of Notre Dame has its proper and, in many ways, unique place among American universities by any of these standards.

Given the broad spectrum of American higher education, it may at first seem pretentious, or even tendentious, to claim uniqueness for any one member of the many groups of colleges or universities that comprise the main elements of this spectrum. Certainly, the claim is not easily acceptable without fairly cogent evidence.

Within the relatively small group of larger Catholic universities, Notre Dame is commonly acclaimed as the best, or at least, the best known. Why? This seems to be again a matter of spirit and tradition as an initial and obvious judgment, but more recently and more solidly and more convincingly, the judgment is based on both potentiality and accomplishment.

Now in its 118th year, Notre Dame is one of the oldest Catholic universities. Age alone proves nothing, but, in this case, it has been characterized by a tenacity, a steady and increasingly dynamic growth, a will to achieve excellence, and a program that seems to promise more accomplishment to that end. While strictly a men's institution (most of the other larger Catholic universities are co-education), Notre Dame has the largest full-time, residential student body of the group. It has by far the highest percentage of full-time, as contrasted to part-time, faculty. It is by all odds the most national in the composition of its student body. It is certainly the most open in its academic relationship to the other more noteworthy members of the American educational community. It has the oldest Law School, one of the few Engineering and Architectural Schools, the only Mediaeval Institute, and is by far the most advanced American Catholic university in the field of science and research.

It has, again by far, the finest physical plant of this group, and an endowment greater than any of the others. Its alumni contribute more annually and in vastly larger numbers. Its graduates have won more Woodrow Wilson Fellowships, Danforth Fellowships, Marshall Fellowships, and Rhodes Scholarships than all of the other Catholic universities combined. It consistently ranks first in the Catholic group as to winners of Fulbright and National Science Fellowships. Its administration also has been called upon continually for Catholic leadership in educational and public affairs: One past President was twice a United States Delegate to important Latin American Conferences, and was one of the six American Cardinals; another was a member of many important governmental and educational commissions; and the present administration and faculty continue the tradition on an even wider front. As a reflection of all of this, Notre Dame's Commencement Exercises last year were graced by the President of the United States, the Cardinal of Milan - former Acting Vatican Secretary of State, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, the Presidents of the National Science Foundation, the Institute of International Education, and Phi Beta Kappa among others.

Such a kaleidoscopic view of an institution is necessarily inadequate, but at least these are more than a few straws in the wind and the total impact of these disaggregate factors does seem to point to some uniqueness of Notre Dame as a leader and, hopefully, an exemplar of excellence in Catholic higher education.

It should be immediately noted, however, that this position is not the sum total of Notre Dame's aspirations as an American university. Notre Dame also strives to be a worthy and qualified member of another discernible group in the total educational spectrum - that group of universities generally rated as first-rate by every university standard. Aspirations must, of course, be attainable if they are to be taken seriously. What reasons are there to take Notre Dame seriously on the score of this most important aspiration to overall educational excellence?

First, there is the spirit and the reality of steady and organic growth towards academic excellence.

Then there are the essential elements of excellence that form the substance of distinction in universities: Ever more carefully selected students chosen from an increasingly wide range of applicants; a faculty that represents both the presence and the promise of greatness in its commitment to this ideal and aspiration to the best in education; a program of studies that is responsive to essentials and devoid of distracting superficialities; a consciousness of what can be done well within one's particular means; physical facilities and a financial structure that are in keeping with the breadth of the institution's hopes; and, integral to all of this, a pervading spirit, atmosphere, eclat, style, or perhaps best of all a deep conviction that the dream is becoming more true every day.

It would be unthinkable for a university to aspire to academic excellence without the existence of such an inner academic core that is cherished, nurtured, and deepened. Many universities are burdened today by over-expansion of curricula, by proliferation of courses and programs that can never become significant or academically respectable, by large proportions of part-time students and faculties, by inadequate facilities and no physical room for future expansion, by a deadening lack of spirit. If this were our case, the statement of our aspirations would be meaningless.

Notre Dame has another quality that makes for uniqueness and strength - the institutional impact of the university. Much is said about the education of the whole man, but nothing is more difficult to achieve. Notre Dame's posture on the educational importance of spiritual and moral values, the insistence on probing the philosophical and theological implications of the burning problems of our day, adds a meaningful dimension to the experience of four years on the campus. The attachment and support of our alumni of all faiths is a powerful tribute to something special.

One should not conclude even this short statement without mentioning

something that may seem peripheral and yet is very important. While Notre Dame receives no financial support whatever from the Catholic Church, it is a Catholic university. In a pluralistic society, Notre Dame has no inclination to be a ghetto, but rather to be more and more in the main stream of American life and to make a contribution to American culture. Unlike many religiously-affiliated institutions, we have always had on our faculty and in our student body, and on our governing and advisory boards and among our supporters, men of all faiths. Notre Dame is, therefore, in a good position to understand and to be understood by all. It may thus be no small part of Notre Dame's ultimate role as a university to be a bridge as well as a beacon.

Remarks of Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.